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# STUDIES IN QUAKER WORSHIP

BY

D. ELTON TRUEBLOOD, PH.D.

*Assistant Professor of Philosophy,*

*Haverford College*

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YOUNG FRIENDS MOVEMENT

1515 CHERRY STREET  
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

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## Preface

THE brief studies printed here for the first time were written in preparation for one of the Round Tables at the Friends General Conference in July, 1934. My method was to write rather carefully on the theme for each day and then to disregard the manuscript during the discussion hour. Though the discussion seldom followed the manuscript, I was able to guide the group thinking more easily than if I had not thought through to my own position in advance. It has occurred to me that the studies might be helpful to other discussion leaders in that, with these used as advance material, each leader will be in much the same position as mine at Cape May. There is much more to say on each topic considered, but studies of this length should serve as a spring-board for new and creative thought. The Aids to Discussion, appended to each chapter, have already been used with success and many more will occur to the resourceful leader.

The reader will note that the books cited in the text are relatively few and this is done intentionally. It is advised that any group using this booklet as the basis of discussion over a considerable period provide itself with the books named in the bibliography. These will make a highly select shelf of books on Quaker worship, and, in my opinion, are much the best works available. All can be purchased for a small sum and should, in any case, be in every meeting house library. The skilful leader will know how to make additional assignments in these books until this outline can become what every textbook is supposed to be, a thread on which to string much other material.

Perhaps a word needs to be said here about the use of the term "Quaker worship." I am well aware that there are many Friends in America, perhaps the majority, who do not choose to worship in the manner herein described. The justification

of the term, however, lies in the fact that the type of worship described is unique in Christendom, while the worship of those Friends who have adopted a stereotyped service is not thus unique. Those who have ceased to worship in this manner have had excellent reasons for their change, but the fact remains that, in so doing, they have given up the historic Quaker way. These studies attempt to describe this unique form of worship and to discuss it as a settled fact. The unique Quaker manner of worship is one of the most interesting of human creations and a subject worthy of careful thought.

D. E. T.

*Haverford, Pa.*  
*December, 1934.*

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## Chapter I

# The Naturalness of Quaker Worship

QUAKER worship seems to many persons a very strange procedure. They are well acquainted with worship which involves the use of choir and organ, or processions, bowing, kneeling and chanting, but they think it odd for people to worship God without bodily action. Much of the belief that Quaker worship is a freakish or bizarre practice comes from unfamiliarity with it. Many have, as children, played "Quaker Meeting" with its

Quaker Meeting has begun,

No more laughing, no more fun,

but relatively few persons have ever attended a Friends meeting for worship. The unfamiliarity is partly due to the widespread belief that strangers are not permitted to enter the meeting houses, and to the equally erroneous belief that only those who are born as Friends are eligible for membership or participation.

The truth is that Quaker worship, far from being queer or fantastic, is probably the most normal and natural practice in the world. It is almost universal for devout souls to cultivate a quiet, waiting spirit in their private times of devotion. What Friends do is to carry this normal spirit of quiet reverence into group experience. A time is appointed for the public worship of God, and those who assemble come together, as might well be expected, in the reverent mood which seems appropriate when we are dealing with great and wonderful things. Accordingly, they are careful not to act in any way inconsistent with the lofty purpose of their gathering. No one speaks in such a meeting unless he is convinced that he has a message from God for his fellows, and when such a message comes to him, he, of course, gives it forth, regardless of his education, age or official standing. Providing people believe in God, in the reverence which comes from knowing God, and in the reality of divine intercourse, a Friends meeting, or something like it,

might well be expected. It is only when our minds are warped by artificiality that this simple response to God seems strange.

Such Quaker worship arose, not because of a doctrine, but as the unreflective and almost unconscious result of a fresh spiritual awakening on the part of certain "Seekers" in the middle of the seventeenth century. "As they came to a knowledge of one another," wrote William Penn, "they sometimes met together, not formally to pray or preach, at appointed times and places, in their own wills, as in times past they were accustomed to do, but waited together in *silence*, and as anything rose in any one of their minds that they thought favoured of a *divine spring*, so they sometimes spoke."<sup>1</sup> In other words, they kept still unless they had something to say, a very wholesome practice. Silence may not be "natural" to the irreverent, but it is the normal response of those who have come to know an experience so great that words are obviously inadequate expressions of it. Such find that no words, not even the best and finest words, are able to satisfy. It was of these Seekers that Robert Barclay wrote when he said,

"Such were necessitated to cease from all externals and to be silent before the Lord . . . and to cease from their own forward words and actings, in the natural willing and comprehension, and feel after this inward seed of life; that, as it moveth, they may move with it, and be actuated by its power, and influenced, whether to pray, preach or sing. And so from this principle of man's being silent, and not acting in the things of God himself, until thus actuated by God's light and grace in the heart, did naturally spring that manner of sitting silent together, and waiting together upon the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

Note in the above quotation the words "did naturally spring."

When we ask more explicitly why this form of worship was "natural" for early Friends we find it was so because of their very important though often unstated premise that divine inspiration is a continuing, immediate reality.<sup>3</sup> If God can speak

<sup>1</sup> *The Rise and Progress of the People Called Quakers*, Chapter I.

<sup>2</sup> *Apology*, XI, vii.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that what is perhaps the strongest defense of this basic Quaker premise was written by a man who was not a Friend, William Law. See his "An Address to the Clergy." "Take away inspiration," he wrote, "or suppose it to cease, and then no religious acts or affections can give forth anything that is godly or divine." Philadelphia, 1856, p. 19.

as vividly and truly to us as He spoke to Abraham or Paul, we shall certainly arrange our worship so as to facilitate and profit by such speaking now. Caroline Stephen, a gifted woman who had much to do with the modern appreciation of Quaker worship, saw this point very clearly a generation ago. "Our manner of worship," she wrote, "is the natural (as it seems to me even the inevitable) result of the full recognition of the reality of Divine inspiration—of the actual living present sufficient fulness of intercourse between the human spirit and Him who is the Father of spirits. Who that truly expects to hear the voice of God can do otherwise than bow in silence before Him?"<sup>4</sup>

We appreciate the importance of this belief in continuous, immediate inspiration when we see how sharply it differs from the implicit position of many non-Friends. The basic assumption of historic Protestantism, with its authoritarian view of the Bible, is that God once spoke directly to men, revealing His will to them, but He did this in a restricted area, viz., Palestine, and in a restricted time, that which ended about A.D. one hundred. It is obvious that the proper mode of worship for those who thus think God was once revealed, but is no longer revealed, is one in which the records of the earlier revelation are cherished and expounded. It is quite in keeping with characteristic Protestant theology, of the type just described, that the center of interest in the place of worship should be a pulpit on which the sacred book rests, and behind which stands the person qualified to expound the book. And it is equally obvious that such a conception of worship cannot be permanently satisfying to people in any period who come to take seriously the conviction that genuine intercourse between God and man is both a permanent possibility and a precious actuality. Such persons may cherish the record of earlier revelations, but they also look expectantly for new revelations at the same time.

One striking evidence of the naturalness of Quaker worship is the fact that it has sprung up independently at various times and places. In fact, something very much like it seems to have been common in the early Christian church. It is clear, from St. Paul's advice to the Christians at Corinth, that their meetings were unprogrammed and that anyone might speak in them.

<sup>4</sup> *Quaker Strongholds*, London, 1911, p. 42.

Paul tells the Corinthians to be careful not to speak when others are speaking. If there had been a stereotyped service with a single leader and speaker this advice would have been superfluous. Moreover, Paul does not write of the Corinthian situation as if it were unique.

The story of how responses to God, similar to that of the Quaker meeting, have sprung up at various times through Christian history has been told by Professor Rufus M. Jones, especially in his *Studies in Mystical Religion and Spiritual Reformers of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Characteristic of this ubiquitous response is that of the "stillen Frommen" or "quiet spirituals" of Reformation Germany. The meeting these Germans formed was "in every respect like a seventeenth century Quaker meeting in their own homes, meeting about in turn, discarding all use of sacraments, and waiting on God for edification rather than on public preaching."<sup>5</sup>

In our own day worship that is practically indistinguishable from that of historic Quakerism has appeared in student conferences sponsored by the Christian Associations, especially in vesper services. This provides a basis on which all can unite in spite of varying backgrounds, because it permits free expression for each individual and does not demand either words or actions in which some cannot conscientiously share. Perhaps the most significant fact is that students frequently enter heartily into such worship with complete satisfaction, in spite of the lack of previous experience of it.<sup>6</sup>

This wholly simple, natural, reverent way of worship has often had in it an appeal to seeking souls that no words could equal. Two statements of how appealing it can be will suffice, one from the seventeenth century and one from the nineteenth. Robert Barclay wrote, "For when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart, and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up."<sup>7</sup> Caroline Stephen's

<sup>5</sup> *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, London, 1928, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> Professor Jones finds such groups in many of the American colleges where he goes as a scheduled speaker. Supplementary meetings after the manner of Friends are often held while he is present.

<sup>7</sup> *Apology*, XI, vii.

experience, though it came over two centuries later, was similar. She had been harassed by doubts and difficulties, and the familiar words of the *Book of Common Prayer*, beautiful as they were in her ears, were productive of mental conflict rather than peace. Then one day she attended a quiet Quaker meeting,

"When lo, on one never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning, I found myself one of a small company of silent worshippers, who were content to sit down together without words, that each one might feel after and draw near to the Divine Presence, unhindered at least, if not helped, by any human utterance. Utterance I knew was free, should the words be given; and before the meeting was over, a sentence or two were uttered in great simplicity by an old and apparently untaught man, rising in his place amongst the rest of us. I did not pay much attention to the words he spoke, and I have no recollection of their purport. My whole soul was filled with the unutterable peace of the undisturbed opportunity for communion with God—with the sense that at last I had found a place where I might, without the faintest suspicion of insincerity, join with others in simply seeking His presence. To sit down in silence could at least pledge me to nothing; it might open to me (as it did that morning) the very gate of heaven."<sup>8</sup>

The most remarkable result of the simple worship we have described is not, however, its effect on the lone individual, but the effect which is often produced on the whole company, knitting the individual persons into a single body. A Friends meeting, at its best, is a splendid example of how the whole may be greater than the sum of its parts.<sup>9</sup> Often there come thoughts and words out of a meeting which were not in the minds of any of the individuals, at least consciously, when the meeting began. Each might have worshipped separately, but the group search was more rewarding because the group developed into a true organism. Group worship is creative because it is organic rather than mechanical. The same experience of enlargement

<sup>8</sup> *Quaker Strongholds*, op. cit., pp. 3, 4.

<sup>9</sup> This is the central thesis of Dr. Howard Brinton in his Swarthmore Lecture, *Creative Worship*, building on the various contemporary conceptions of emergent evolution, including that of General Jan Smuts which is termed "Holism." All the upholders of "emergence" point to the possibility of the production of genuine novelty as a result of coördination. A Friends meeting gives evidence that the emergent view is correct. Dr. Brinton sees Puritanism as congenial to the concept of mechanism while Quakerism is congenial to the concept of organism.

of each individual as he shares in the group life was interpreted, long ago, by Isaac Penington, in terms of coals of fire. "They are like a heap of fresh and burning coals warming one another," he wrote, "as a great strength, freshness and vigor of life flows into all."<sup>10</sup> Experience is the true guide in life, and those who have had the experience which Penington describes turn naturally and inevitably, again and again, to quiet worship.

## Aids to Discussion

1. Read aloud I Corinthians 14:26-40, and try to reconstruct the picture of Christian worship in Apostolic times. Did St. Paul go as far as Friends do in his desire for equality? Use Dr. Moffatt's translation if it is available.

2. Attempt to state precisely the conception of the Bible that is consistent with Quaker worship. Does the widening of the area of inspiration involve a lowered conception of the Bible?

3. In what way is Quaker worship dependent upon a special belief about the nature of God? What is this belief? Read St. John's Gospel, 4:1-24. Try to make an understandable definition of "spiritual."

4. A. Ruth Fry writes, "One might liken the gathered company to a group of aeroplanes ascending into the stratosphere, above the currents and clouds from the earth's atmosphere, where they have reached undisturbed calm." What is true and what untrue about this analogy? Try to think of other analogies which help to make clear the experience which Quaker worship intends.

5. Henry W. Nevins, the distinguished journalist, has likened Friends to a bag of sand, of which each isolated grain is a negligible quantity, whereas the whole bag presents a well-nigh irresistible mass. To what extent is this a satisfactory comparison? Is a bag of sand an *organic* whole?

<sup>10</sup> *A Further Testimony to the Truth*, p. 55.

## Chapter II

### The Elimination of Aids to Worship

WHAT strikes the ordinary visitor to a Friends meeting house as most remarkable is its bareness. The average place of Quaker worship is a plain room, thoroughly innocent of decoration, austere in its simplicity. Usually there are no pictures on the walls, there is no colored glass in the windows, and there is no musical instrument in sight. The building lacks a pulpit, just as it lacks an altar, and the plain benches are provided with neither prayer books, hymnals nor Bibles. There is no baptismal font, there are no plates for the offering, there are no candles burning. In Whittier's well known lines, it is a place

where, perchance, no human tongue  
Shall utter words; where never hymn is sung,  
Nor deep-toned organ blown, nor censer swung;  
Nor dim light falling through the pictured pane.

Such a description as we have just given is almost wholly negative, and there is a sense in which Quaker worship is unique because of what it leaves out, though this is by no means the whole story, as we shall soon see. It is surprising to many to learn that worship can be carried on effectively with none of the usual aids, for these are often considered indispensable. The particular aids omitted by Friends, which have inspired the most voluminous apologetics in the past, are the ceremonies known as sacraments, especially the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. A discussion of the sacraments is instructive because it can show well how the Quaker position is a strongly affirmative one.

The sacraments have received their emphasis for two reasons: first, they seem to be commanded in the words of Jesus, and, second, they are practically universal among Christians, both Catholic and Protestant. Friends in an earlier day were often



challenged to defend their position on the sacraments, so that their omission came to occupy a far larger place than it deserves.<sup>1</sup> In reality, the omission of sacraments is merely a detail in the general picture and no more significant than the omission of music or creedal pronouncements. The emphasis on the omission has had the unhappy effect of creating the impression that the Quaker faith is primarily negative, but the truth is that Friends regard all life as potentially sacramental. Any water that quenches thirst and brings cleanliness is holy water, and any bread that sustains men and women in whom there is a capacity for fellowship with God is holy bread. Why should we limit ourselves to two or three or seven sacraments, when there are so many? The opening of a great book may be a sacramental act, as also may be the going on a journey, the giving of money to those in need, the learning of a great thought, the planting of a tree, the growing of a garden, the building of a home. The Friend holds that the number of the sacraments is seventy times seven; he has no patience with the concept of the commonplace. He holds, moreover, that this is the clear teaching of Jesus, who attempted to introduce the religion of the spirit, which is so much larger than a religion based on ceremonial commands.

Even those who never enter Friends meeting houses can see that Friends make no use of ecclesiastical architecture in the usual sense.<sup>2</sup> Friends want to bear witness to the truth that no one place is necessarily more holy than others, since God dwells in human hearts rather than in temples made with hands. The Friends meeting houses are places of convenience only, and are so constructed that there is little or nothing of an artificial nature to serve as a distraction. Though George Fox had a strong aversion to "steeple-houses," modern Friends have no such feeling, but appreciate the beauty of many churches and enjoy the Gothic revival. They admit, moreover, that vaulted ceilings tend to produce an emotion of awe, just as solemn

<sup>1</sup> Note the disproportionate place occupied by the problem of the sacraments in the Richmond Declaration of Faith. The question is argued largely as though it were a matter of proof texts.

<sup>2</sup> It should be added that Friends have developed in some places a style of their own which has genuine charm. This is largely a matter of proportion and shows how beauty may be independent of decoration. The new meeting house at Westtown School is an example. The Jordans meeting house in England is a good example from an earlier century.

music does, but they choose to worship God in simple directness, fearing that such excellent helps may become "crutches."

What requires emphasis is the fact that architectural beauty, incense, chanting, and sacramental rites are *only* aids; they are *means* of arriving at the great experience of God, and they are thoroughly superfluous religiously if God can be found directly in the quietness of our own hearts. One does not bother to use the bridge if he can cross the stream at a single step. Moreover, there is great danger that the pomp and ceremony of worship may loom so large that they become ends in themselves. It is surely not unfair to say that many church attenders are so intent on a punctilious observance of rites, that they forget that for which the rites were originated. If the bridge is *too* grand we may easily stop to contemplate it instead of using it as a means of passage to the other shore.

It is thoroughly possible that there is a type of person who can never be happy in a simple Quaker meeting, because some may be so constituted that they demand the psychological aids to worship, but there are certainly others whose full needs cannot be met except in the unadorned Quaker way. Probably a considerable amount of shifting about is desirable in religious groups, for some who are born as Friends ought not to remain in the Quaker fold, while others should join it, even though their background has been quite different.

Friends do not hold that set prayers, responses, and music are bad, but that the less circuitous approach to God is more successful for themselves. Friends cultivate art and music in other ways; they attend musical concerts and patronize art exhibits, but they do not want these in the hour of worship. If any of the aids are to be used, they must be used well or the result is really harmful and the distraction complete. If they are to be used well, they should be carefully rehearsed, but this kind of advance planning violates the essential feature of the Quaker meeting, the unwillingness to *limit* the immediate deliverances of the Spirit of God, whatever those deliverances may be. If we decide that, at a certain moment, we shall sing an anthem or that, at another, we shall offer a prayer, we are so far precluding the possibility of immediate response to God's direct leading. If we do not make careful and precise arrange-

ment of artistic and musical accompaniments of worship the result is likely to be hopelessly amateurish and bungling. The director of public worship who waits until after the service has begun to choose his hymns is more often a careless workman than a zealous adherent of immediate inspiration.

We can be directly led of God at other times than the hour of meeting, but a Friends meeting is one in which a peculiarly zealous attempt is made to seek God's leading for the group, there and then. If one individual, before the group meets, decides exactly what is to be done *when* the group meets, he is thereby helping to defeat the great experiment in organic wholeness. It is as though the hand were to dictate to the rest of the body. If song breaks out with genuine spontaneity, as a result of the group life, it is thoroughly consistent with the Quaker ideal.

The only apparent exception to the statement that Quaker worship dispenses with psychological aids and, instead of using such aids, attempts to find God directly, is found in the Quaker use of silence. Silence is used as an aid by some Christians, notably in the Catholic mass, and is there most effective. It should be kept in mind, however, that Quaker silence is very different. It is not a "fixed" silence, as it is in other Christian groups, but is "free" silence instead. In free silence there is always the possibility that the silence may be broken, whereas fixed silence is scheduled *as* silence. There is no scheduled silence in a Quaker meeting.

Silence, in Friends worship, has a double role to fill. It is (a) the setting for expression, the medium out of which speaking comes, and (b) a form of expression, a way of saying what cannot otherwise be said. Silence is often appreciated for only one of these two rôles, but the history of Quakerism has shown that the two are equally important.

The first rôle of silence in Quaker worship is important because, as such, it tends to produce what has been called a "waiting ministry." It is well known that words arising out of a tense silence come with a vigor that can seldom be equalled. Words may be strongly impressed upon a worshipper's mind, but he does not have to hurry. He does not have to begin when the anthem ends or when he is "introduced," for there is no

anthem and he is not introduced. He can wait until his own mind is completely clear and, when the entire group is in a thoroughly quiet mood, he can begin. The quietness which helps to make the words so effective, both for the speaker and for those who listen, is much more than a mere cessation of words. It is a deep quietness of the whole soul, not the quietness of inactivity, but a quietness like that of a perfectly balanced motor, running at full speed. Quietness is thoroughly compatible with power and fulness of life. It is to be remembered that the old fashioned wooden pump is most noisy when the well is going dry and is comparatively quiet when the refreshing water is pouring through it.

When we consider the second rôle of silence in Quaker worship we find that its importance can hardly be overestimated. When the true wonder of life strikes us, all words, even all rites and symbols, seem poor expressions. How harmful words can be has been well expressed by Violet Hodgkin. She is telling of the great moment which often comes in the closing session of London Yearly Meeting, a time which persons full of creaturely zeal do not have the good sense to leave undisturbed.

"And then, with an almost physical wrench and jar, the steady drip-drip of unneeded words has broken the united silence; has, not interpreted it, but shivered it into a thousand fragments. The vision of heights and depths at which we had barely gazed has been swiftly withdrawn. We have found ourselves plodding again the sadly familiar high-road, from threadbare metaphor to hackneyed text; and back again."<sup>3</sup>

Silence, also, can be utterly dead, quite as dull as the hackneyed metaphor, and is sometimes hardly distinguishable from sleep. This shows that no method, not even the simplest, is a sure way. But when silence is a "living" silence it has a healing effect, not to be surpassed. When we are tired out with disputations, which today tend to be economic rather than theological, silence can restore balanced perspective and help us to find God. The healing effect has found a persuasive witness in Caroline Stephen:

"It seems to me that nothing but silence can heal the wounds made by disputations in the region of the unseen.

<sup>3</sup> *Silent Worship*, London, 1919, p. 79.

No external help, at any rate, has ever in my own experience proved so penetratingly efficacious as the habit of joining in a public worship based upon silence. Its primary attraction for me was in the fact that it pledged me to nothing, and left me altogether undisturbed to seek for help in my own way. But before long I began to be aware that the united and prolonged silences had a far more direct and powerful effect than this. They soon began to exercise a strangely subduing and softening effect upon my mind. There used, after a while, to come upon me a deep sense of awe, as we sat together and waited—for what? In my heart of hearts I knew in Whose Name we were met together, and Who was truly in the midst of us. Never before had His influence revealed itself to me with so much power as in these quiet assemblies.”<sup>4</sup>

It is impossible to believe that there are not many in the world today who are longing for the quieting and healing experience of which Caroline Stephen wrote so eloquently and to which thousands of simple persons have attested. As long as there are any persons in the world who are more likely to come to know God by the simple Quaker approach, we dare not fail to keep that approach available.

## Aids to Discussion

1. Friends do not find any evidence that particular sacramental acts are commanded in the New Testament. Would the Quaker position be undermined if there were evidence of such commands?

2. Some meetings have attempted to stimulate spiritual life by appointing someone to read a chapter from the Bible at the beginning of the meeting hour. Is this a wise practice?

3. Some meetings place flowers in the meeting house where they may be seen by the worshippers. Is this an introduction of an “aid” to worship? Is the introduction of an open fire at the focus of attention a departure from Quaker plainness? If we use flowers, why should we not use pictures?

4. Dean Inge writes, “The true mystic cares little about symbolism, and often dislikes it. His inner world is so rich in

<sup>4</sup> *Quaker Strongholds*, op. cit., p. 45.

forms, sounds and colours that he objects to having poor imitations of the sublime thrust upon his senses while he is communing with the Eternal." Is this an adequate statement of the Quaker position?

5. Is it advisable for an attender at meeting to take with him devotional literature which he reads during the silent times?

6. In some meetings, the worshippers rise to their feet when someone begins vocal prayer. What is the advantage of this practice? Is it an evidence of formalism? Is kneeling likewise an evidence of formalism?

### Chapter III

## Democracy in Worship

THE basic Quaker premise that divine inspiration is continuous, immediate and direct necessarily entails democracy in worship. Since God is neither a respecter of persons, nor of places, nor of times, it is not possible in advance to know through what vehicle God will be pleased to make His will known in the hour of worship. This means that each attender at a Friends meeting is a potential minister, regardless of age, sex, experience or education. Seventeenth century Friends loved to express this aspect of Quaker democracy by saying that it was not training at Oxford or Cambridge that could make a man a minister; it was the direct word of God in his own heart that alone could suffice. Not all can go to Oxford or Cambridge, but any human being may discover, thought Fox, that his own heart has been touched by God.

The conception just mentioned has sometimes been put into a neat formula by saying that, whereas other Christian bodies have hierarchies, Quakerism alone is a "lay religion." The more adequate statement, however, is to the effect that Quakerism has abolished, not the priesthood, but the laity. The term "Quaker layman" is really self-contradictory. Martin Luther, at the time of the Protestant Reformation, employed the slogan "the priesthood of the believer," and seventeenth century Friends made a particularly zealous attempt to take these words seriously, as Luther did not.

Democracy in worship is logically implied in a belief in the Inner Light, the Light of God's Holy Spirit in each human soul, potentially in all and actually in those who are obedient. This fact of logical implication was well expressed in a remarkable paper which English Friends prepared in 1920 in connection with the World Conference on Faith and Order.

"From this source all our special 'testimonies' flow. The Light of Christ in the soul may be experienced by all: no form of the Divine Grace is the monopoly of priestly caste, through whom alone it can be ministered to others. . . . Anyone may experience the 'anointing,' and, if this is known, may be called to minister to others of what God has given."

This aspect of our ministry has also been expressed historically by speaking of a free ministry. The word "free" used in this context, has, as Caroline Stephen pointed out, three different meanings. Quaker ministry is free in that it is (1) open to all, (2) free from pre-arrangement, (3) unpaid.<sup>1</sup> As long as Quaker ministry is free it may lack some of the polish of the great ministry in the churches, but it at least avoids the danger of professionalism. A person does not share his thoughts in a Friends meeting because he is paid to do so, nor because he must speak whether he is inspired or not, but only if he feels an unanswerable urge within him. We may summarize the various meanings of the free ministry by saying that it frees utterance, as far as possible, from human manipulation.

It must be admitted that Friends have never accepted in practice the full view of democratic worship which seems to be implied in the central Quaker faith. There has often been genuine democracy in business meetings, and Friends conferences are conspicuous for the fact that they, unlike ordinary religious gatherings, are attended by the rank and file rather than by the leaders only, but genuine democracy in worship has been more difficult to achieve. Even seventeenth century Quakerism, if we may judge by the length of the reported and printed sermons, failed to achieve a complete democracy of worship as much as we do. Part of the difficulty is physical. It is very hard to arrange the interior of a meeting house in accord with pure democracy. The "facing seats" of our older meeting houses are assuredly better for this purpose than is a pulpit, to which all eyes are turned, but it is a well known fact that the facing seats often become in practice little more than a speaker's platform. Their very elevation helps to produce this result. The characteristic Friends meeting house is "wider than it is long" and this avoids to some extent the auditorium setting,

<sup>1</sup> *Quaker Strongholds*, loc. cit., p. 75.



with its speaker-audience relationship, but it is not completely successful in this regard.

Some of the newer meeting houses are being arranged without facing seats at all, and others have experimented with a hollow square formation. A few have even avoided having any designated "head of the meeting" and no one knows, in advance, who will take upon himself the responsibility of "breaking the meeting" by shaking hands with his neighbor. It should be said that even a hollow square formation may be defeated in its purpose if the well known leaders tend to congregate on one side. The others will select the seats opposite them and often make an audience relationship in spite of the gigantic efforts to avoid it.

A closely allied problem is that of the "call" to the ministry. Throughout a large part of the history of Quakerism there has been emphasis upon a special vocation, even in the sections in which Friends have been true to the ideal of a free ministry, at least in the sense of unpaid. Certain individuals have felt "called," in a manner similar to that in vogue in other Christian bodies, the only major difference being that the Friend thus called has continued to earn his living as before. Often these persons have been given special recognition by the Society and have been aided generously in their travels. Though Friends have never ordained ministers, they have "recorded" or recognized their gifts, and this is sometimes looked upon as practically the equivalent of ordination. In fact, "recorded" Quaker ministers are entitled to clergy rates on the railroads.

Friends are now divided on the question of official recognition of a gift in the ministry. Those who uphold the ancient practice think the work of the individual thus gifted is enhanced if he has this tangible evidence of the backing of his fellows, while recognition, it is asserted, may encourage the further development of his gift. Those who oppose the practice hold that it is a direct denial of our Quaker democracy and that more responsibility will be assumed by the general membership if we refuse to single out a few for special attention. They fear that the rank and file may learn to wait for those known as public Friends, and will not be responsive to the promptings of their own hearts. Considerations of this kind have led

English Friends and those of the Friends General Conference in America to cease recording gifts in the ministry.

It is instructive to contrast the official pronouncements of the two Philadelphia Yearly Meetings in this regard. Race Street Friends say:

"We do not set anyone apart whose special duty it is to supply the spoken word in our meetings. The varying needs of a meeting can be best supplied by different personalities, and a meeting is enriched by the sharing of any living experience of God."<sup>2</sup>

Arch Street Friends, on the other hand, after voicing the usual emphasis on general responsibility, go on to say:

"We believe, however, that some are in an eminent degree called to this service, and that when a member has frequently ministered to the help and uplift of his fellow worshippers, the Meeting should recognize his gift and encourage it by sympathy and support."<sup>3</sup>

There is also a strong movement against recognition of gifts on the part of a minority in other American Yearly Meetings. These feel that early Friends did not see the full implication of their position in this important particular. Characteristic of this growing sentiment in American Quakerism are the following words of Janet Payne Whitney:

"I do not believe that there is such a thing as a 'call to the ministry,' as we usually use the phrase. A call to the ministry of each other there is to each one of us, and that must involve, sometimes, speaking in meeting. . . . But I cannot believe that anybody gets a permanent call to that special service in the sense that wherever they are they regard themselves rather in the light of a speaker, and are so regarded by others, to the detriment of a varied and well-spread vocal ministry, and also to the spirit of true worship."<sup>4</sup>

It will be interesting to observe how the experiment in non-recognition of ministry works out in those Yearly Meetings which have adopted this course. It is conceivable that the full

<sup>2</sup> *The Book of Discipline*, Philadelphia, 1927, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Faith and Practice*, Philadelphia, 1926, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> "Worship," pp. 8, 9.

democracy, which seems to be implied in the Quaker position, is not desirable, and that we want to place some limitation upon it. In fact we do place a strong limitation upon it in that we have elders and others whose task it is to look after the good order of our meetings and occasionally to deal with offenders. We are willing to pay the price of liberty by running considerable risk of being bothered by those whose words are unprofitable, but we do not run the risk completely. Persons are sometimes silenced when their freedom is obviously trampling on the freedom of their fellow worshippers. Some non-Friends are shocked when they learn this, feeling that Friends ought, in consistency, to listen to anyone at any length on any subject. Most Friends, however, prefer to temper their freedom and democracy with common sense. It is encouraging to realize how seldom a meeting is imposed upon by propagandists. It is not often that anyone needs to be silenced, since the very atmosphere of a good meeting makes light speaking difficult. Where there are strong evidences of a deep, worshipful spirit on every hand, it takes a very bold and presumptuous person to shatter this spirit by his own inappropriate and opinionated remarks. Such an atmosphere is a prime necessity in our meetings, which are bound to fail if we permit them to have the well known controversial and talkative mood of the Forum.

It should also be said that those who care especially about the welfare of the meeting must be as zealous to encourage the right kind of ministry as to restrain the wrong kind. An appreciative word, spoken to a beginner at the proper time, may give him encouragement and his ability may grow by experience. Perhaps, then, the ideal democracy of a Friends meeting is like the democracy of a family in which the older members enhance the life of the younger ones, both by encouragement and restraint. An ideal democracy need not involve a dearth of leaders or a dead level of uniformity. In every coöperative enterprise among men leadership emerges, but we want to make sure that we erect no artificial barriers to its emergence. The ideal Quaker leader does not belong to a class apart, but is one in a fellowship of comrades, who happens to lead because he is stronger or more gifted in some respects than others are, and not because he is appointed.

## Aids to Discussion

1. Would the ideal of democracy in worship be more nearly reached if Friends were to assemble in an easy, informal manner, as in a parlor? Would this involve a loss in reverence?

2. Attempt to state all the arguments for and against the "recording" of gifts in the ministry. What is the effect on those recognized? On those persons not recognized?

3. What are the forces which often lead Friends to renounce the democratic ideal and establish a pastoral system? Can worship continue to be democratic even if the meeting has a paid worker?

4. Is there a place, in a meeting for worship, for occasional sermons long enough to make a fairly thorough presentation of some theme? Do we lose anything if our messages are *always* short and fragmentary?

5. Would it be wise to appoint different groups of members to occupy the "facing seats" on different days? Would the gain in an increased and widened sense of responsibility be over-balanced by the loss in continuity and orderly procedure?

## Chapter IV

### The Workshop of the Ministry

THE late John William Graham, both in his Swarthmore Lecture and in his more detailed work, *The Faith of a Quaker*, made a signal contribution to Quaker thought in his emphasis on the meeting for worship as the workshop of the Quaker ministry. The workshop of most ministry is the study. There the clergyman takes a theme or a text, and, with the use of commentaries or other helps, constructs a sermon. By the end of the week it is a finished product, ready to be delivered to a listening congregation. The historic Quaker way is quite different. The Quaker stores his mind all along with as many ideas, scraps of information, works of poetry and the like as he can discover and he goes to the hour of worship, not with a prepared sermon, but with a prepared mind. Then, in the intense mood of group worship, he often finds that the materials which have long been in his mind arrange themselves together in thoroughly new ways. We are reminded of scraps of metal which cannot be joined by ordinary cold processes, but fuse in the white heat of an electric torch.

The worship which produces sermons of the kind just mentioned is genuinely a creative worship, to use the term which Howard Brinton has popularized. It does not create new information, but it creates a new relationship between the bits of information already possessed. It does not produce new materials, but it arranges old materials in new patterns. Any one who has experienced this creative process cannot doubt the validity of the idea and is usually willing to follow the method at all costs. Often the meeting hour is one of such intense intellectual and spiritual activity that the person who speaks is himself surprised at the finished product. This, without doubt, is the reason for the widespread earlier belief in a supernatural theory of the ministry. The individual felt that the words were not his own; he seemed to be the vehicle of another.

Such ministry may be understood in terms of the work of a cabinet maker. All of the bits of wood and other materials are already at hand, and the tools are there to use; the workman does not have to create these things. But all the bits of wood and all the tools are inadequate unless the workman himself has the creative experience of turning the existent materials into a new unit. Likewise a brief message in a meeting for worship may use poetry learned ten years earlier, a scrap of historical knowledge possessed by all in the room, a verse from the Bible, and many other ingredients. All of the component parts form themselves into an unpredictable whole in a surprisingly short time. It is the experience of many that messages can thus be constructed in five or ten minutes that could hardly be thought out in as many hours in a less intense spiritual atmosphere.

This kind of ministry has a freshness and inspiring quality that is hard to match. Though there are some very great written sermons, it may be that the best sermons formed in the mood of worship are superior to even the finest of what Robert Barclay called "conned and gathered stuff." The whole passage in which these words appear is worthy of quotation:

"And as every one is thus gathered, and so met together inwardly in their spirits, as well as outwardly in their persons, there the secret power and virtue of life is known to refresh the soul, and the pure motions and breathings of God's spirit are felt to arise; from which, as words of declaration, prayers or praises arise, the acceptable worship is known, which edifies the church, and is well-pleasing to God. And no man here limits the Spirit of God, nor bringeth forth his own conned and gathered stuff; but every one puts that forth which the Lord puts into their hearts: and it is uttered forth not in man's will and wisdom; but in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit, and of power."<sup>1</sup>

This is not to say that there is no place for the prepared address. There is a great place for it in many gatherings, but it seldom reaches the heights which are reached in the best of the messages delivered in the manner so strongly advocated by Barclay. The difference is similar to the difference between prose and poetry. The minister whose workshop is the meeting for worship is following what may be called the mystical way,

<sup>1</sup> *Apology*, XI, vi.

but mysticism and poetry are closely allied. The mystic and the poet are persons who short-circuit across the usually laborious modes of thought or expression and come rapidly to the heart of the matter. Caroline Stephen asserted her belief that the power which distinguishes such mystics as Jacob Boehme and George Fox "is essentially the same gift which in a different form, or in combination with a different temperament and gifts of another order, makes poets."<sup>2</sup>

One difference, however, between the characteristic Quaker ministry and poetry is that the former is very largely a coöperative enterprise, whereas the latter, at least in its modern form, is a matter of individual effort. One of the most striking results of the ministry which arises directly out of the period of worship is the supplementation which the messages often provide one another. It is not uncommon for one message to support and enlarge upon and counterbalance another, until the whole hour is a unified organic structure, like a great cathedral with its balanced thrusts. The messages need not be uniform, but, taken in their entirety, they may make a richer harmony than a single isolated address could ever produce. Such group ministry is like part singing or like orchestra music, in which the very contrasts contribute to the total musical effect. This is so common in Friends meetings, where there is any life at all, that habitual attenders are conscious of a wrench or jar when someone introduces a patently alien element. Almost always, when such an alien element is introduced, it comes because a speaker brings up a subject which he has determined in advance to speak upon. *It does not come out of the meeting; it is injected into the meeting.*

There has been, in the past, some confusion concerning the relationship between intellectual activity and Quaker worship, certain early writers going so far as to suggest that the individual must be completely empty, even of thought. There is a sense in which one must be passive, for certainly a frantic search for ideas is not the way to the mystical or creative ministry we seek. A poet cannot write by saying frantically to himself that he must find a topic for the day's poem, as we may see in the miserable daily verses in the newspapers. It is equally true that

<sup>2</sup> *Quaker Strongholds*, p. 28.

a minister cannot succeed if he begins to cudgel his brain. The best wisdom seems to consist in beginning an hour of worship in a calm but receptive mood, and then, oddly enough, one often finds that the most amazing intellectual activity sets in. The ancient Friends were right in emphasizing the danger of "creaturely activity," even of the mind, but this must not be understood to mean that the ideal worship is that in which the mind is vacant. It is neither inappropriate nor surprising that so many messages in meeting begin with the words, "I have been thinking as we have been worshipping together."

What topics lend themselves to the ministry which arises out of the mood of worship and may be called mystical ministry, which is akin to poetry? Almost any materials can be used, just as the cabinet maker uses many kinds, but very great care is needed if controversial subjects are to be introduced. If a meeting comes to have a Forum atmosphere or if the people present begin to exchange "views" on current topics the meeting is already ruined. Current material is valuable if it is used, not for its own sake, but as a means of arousing in others the sense of life's wonder or their part in it. The advice of John William Graham in this regard is most valuable:

"It may be asked, what may be used by way of illustrations, or to drive an argument home? May literary quotations, public events, facts from newspapers, deaths, accidents, general elections, come in? My view and practice is that anything may come in that can be ignited in the furnace of production, and so does not bring down the temperature of the sermon. It must become part of the inspiration. It must not be dragged in to make the address pretty or interesting, or as a tassel for its adornment. Within these limits pile on the faggots, and let them blaze. Anything that will burn will do."<sup>3</sup>

The presentation of special "causes" is most inappropriate in a meeting for worship, though it may have an important function in addresses scheduled for such a purpose. Thus a sermon on "world peace" or "prohibition" or "race relations" or "national planning" almost never seems to arise out of the worship or conduce to its augmentation. A speaker may well tell some story of the war as an example of human misery or bravery;

<sup>3</sup> *The Quaker Ministry*, p. 78.



he may well mention the effort to overcome the traffic in rum as an evidence of man's zeal in overcoming evil; he may well tell a story of racial intolerance to make his hearers have a deepened sense of the tragedy of life. But when a speaker tries to convert his hearers to a special point of view on social or political or even theological matters, he is a propagandist and not a mystical preacher of the wonder of God and man. As a steady diet it is far more satisfactory to hear messages on the grace of God than to hear arguments on the N. R. A. or the Eighteenth Amendment.

We dare not stress the freedom of Quaker worship without emphasizing, at the same time, the need for a spirit of restraint which will serve to forestall easy or trivial talk. The danger is that our ministry may descend to the level in which there is the mere statement of opinion, the uninspired narrative of some incident in the speaker's life, the purely intellectual exposition of a text. Such superficial ministry can be avoided if we take seriously the idea that the meeting hour should be a time of intense creative effort, an effort which may be described as either prophetic or poetic. Ministry of this kind will not be couched, as a rule, in "poetic diction" and will make little use of grand phrases, but the common phrases and common facts will be lifted beyond themselves because they are parts of an inspired whole. There need be no evidence of physical excitation on the part of the speaker; much movement of arms is not a necessary factor in an aroused and lifted spirit.

Often we read some stanza of poetry that suddenly makes life more radiant for us or opens up new worlds as the reading of Chapman's Homer did for Keats. The poem may use words we have long known and may deal with ideas which are familiar, but, because the words and ideas have gone through the heated furnace of the poet's imagination, they are like tempered steel and therefore penetrate our hearts. That is the normal result to expect from ministry which arises out of the white heat of the hour of group worship. No one has described this effect better than has Rufus M. Jones:

"Vital ministry is not abstract and doctrinal, it is charged with insight for the meaning and significance of *life*. It answers back to specific human need. It 'speaks to the condition'

of souls. It correlates with concrete reality. It sets our hearts beating. It quickens drooping spirits. It restores waning faith. It fortifies the wills of those who hear it. It makes the world look different. That means that it must *come out of life* and, if it is to have value, it must *refresh life*.”<sup>4</sup>

Vital ministry will not arise unless we take our meetings for worship seriously. It cannot be turned on as water is turned on at a spigot, but it must have time to develop as it will. This is the real reason why our meetings for worship should not be as brief as some are. Though a few persons can bring their messages to the point described in a short time, many others, and particularly those not accustomed to the experience of speaking, need a longer time. An hour would seem to be about the right length of time for most persons. Often a considerable portion of the hour is needed in order to get one's spirit really calm. Thus Christopher Story, writing of a meeting at his house in 1672, could say:

“I was hard beset to keep my mind from running hither and thither after the transitory things of this world; and a great warfare I had for the greatest part of the meeting. Yet near the conclusion, those vain thoughts vanished, and . . . I was wonderfully comforted in my spirit, and my inward man renewed in a sense of the Lord's nearness.”

In any case we cannot expect great ministry if people continue to arrive well towards the end of the period, and especially if the hour of worship is looked upon as a mere prelude to the class instruction which often follows. The meeting for worship, for the true Friend, is the great event of the week, to be awaited with expectancy and remembered with thankfulness.

## Aids to Discussion

1. Consider the following sentence from the pen of Matthew Arnold: “The strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry.” Is this true? How does this bear upon the subject of the foregoing chapter?

<sup>4</sup> *The Trail of Life in the Middle Years*, N. Y., 1934, p. 46.

2. Attempt to list all the ways in which a Quaker meeting resembles a Forum and all the ways in which it differs from a Forum. Do the same for a Discussion Group.

3. What is the advantage of stocking one's memory with poetry, incidents and miscellaneous bits of knowledge? Should stories be introduced for the entertainment of one's auditors?

4. Thomas Clarkson, writing a century ago concerning Friends, said, "They take no thought as to what they shall say. They endeavor to avoid, on the other hand, all activity of the imagination, and everything that rises from the will of man. The creature is thus brought to be passive, and the spiritual faculty to be disencumbered, so that it can receive and attend to the spiritual language of the Creator." Did Clarkson understand essential Quakerism?

5. Would it be a step in the right direction if some Friends meetings were to institute adult classes in the art of public speaking? How would such a step affect the ministry?

## Chapter V

### Preparation for Worship

WHEN we speak of preparation for Quaker worship we mean the same as preparation for Quaker ministry because each worshipper is potentially a minister. It has seemed to some that preparation of any kind is inconsistent with essential Quakerism, since Friends hold that the hour of meeting together may be a time of immediate inspiration. If we prepare in advance what we are to say, are we not precluding the possibility of constant revelation? This argument begs the question as to what inspiration is and fails to make the important distinction between preparation of a speech and preparation of a life, from which effective speaking may come. The distinction is a delicate one and some care is needed if we are to understand correctly the kind of preparation that is valid. In the words of John A. Hughes,

"It is best described as a life attitude, a sensitive exposure of ourselves to good, the habitual endeavor to learn the ways of God, to meditate on the problem of life and living until we have learned them, to school and train our moral natures; in short to practise the spirit in its awareness of life's deepest meanings and to act in accordance with our insights. Such preparation has often taken place at the tail of a plough, or as a man has wielded a hammer in a blacksmith shop."<sup>1</sup>

That preparation for worship and for effective ministry is necessary can hardly be said too often or too strongly. Though the meeting for worship is indeed the workshop of the ministry, the worker there cannot be a good craftsman if he has not already provided himself with materials from which to make his finished product, as well as the tools with which it is to be fashioned. The thoughts that come in the hour of worship are often new creations, but novelty requires background. If a man does not have a well filled mind he cannot hope to have any-

<sup>1</sup> "A Prophetic Ministry," *The Friend*, Philadelphia, Aug. 16, 1934, p. 52.

thing effective to say or even to think. The Spirit of God inspires men who are already striving to see more light. Many of the greatest of scientific hypotheses have come to the minds of their originators, notably Newton and Darwin, in a great flash of insight, but the flash comes only after long and laborious thought and study. The flash is an amazing thing, a genuine miracle, but it comes, either in science or in religion, only to those who are ready for it. This fact, as applied to Quaker worship and ministry, has been vigorously expressed by Rufus M. Jones:

"The Quaker group silence, the coöperative teamwork of the entire assembly, the expectant hush, the sense of divine presence, the faith that God and man can come into mutual and reciprocal correspondence, tend to heighten the spiritual quality of the person who rises in that kind of atmosphere to speak. But that group situation, important as it is, will not work the miracle of producing a message for the hour in a person who is sterile and has nothing to say."<sup>2</sup>

There is an unpredictable element in all true worship, as in all life, and we cannot know when the great moment will come in which we experience vividly the presence of God, but we can at least say the great moment never arrives for the totally unprepared. The growth of a plant under the direct influence of sun and rain is an ever new miracle, but the miracle does not take place unless there is already a seed in the ground.

The necessity of background for the Quaker ministry is abundantly clear when we see its relationship, on the one hand, to poetry, and, on the other, to extempore speaking. Wordsworth well defined poetry as emotion recollected in tranquility, and much of the poetic feeling in a meeting for worship comes because the high moments of the past are lived again in the quietness of a truly calm and tranquil hour. But no amount of tranquility will suffice if there have not been the emotions to recollect. The good extempore speaker seems to depend only on the present, but a little reflection makes us know that such a speaker is constantly drawing on his reserves. He uses the words in new ways, but they are old words, and he cannot use materials which are not already his. Really good extempore

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<sup>2</sup> *The Trail of Life in the Middle Years*, op. cit., p. 45.

speaking thus demands a greater degree of preparation than is demanded by the "prepared" speech.

What are the chief ways in which adequate preparation for worship and ministry may be made? We may list four:

(1) *The expectant mood.* One of the chief reasons why many people receive no benefit from the hour of worship is that they do not expect to receive, much less to give. They attend meeting in a matter of fact manner, as though going to market, and not at all as though they expect to experience "The Presence in the midst." The result is that the hour is spent in a lethargic manner and the attender is relieved when the meeting breaks up. It is something to be endured and not, they seem to say, to be sought with eagerness.

A similar point is that of the value of *intention*. We are not likely to achieve any important ends unless we intend to do so, unless we really *want* to do so. To find God and to enjoy His real presence is the grandest of human undertakings, and surely this cannot be successful unless the will to find Him, the intention, and the desire are already present. God does not seem to reveal Himself to those who do not seek Him, and seldom does He do so to the unexpectant.

(2) *Human love.* A second manner of preparation has to do with our relations with our fellows. It is well known that such relations may have an undeniable negative effect, as when lack of love seems to close up the windows of the soul. This is especially true if the person towards whom one feels anger, suspicion or mere unfriendliness is in the same room. It would appear that there could be no worse preparation for worship than to go to meeting nursing a grudge. If we do not love our fellows, whom we have seen, asks St. John, how shall we love God, whom we have not seen?

The important point is that the proposition about human love may be given a positive as well as the familiar negative application. If we go to meeting with a radiant sense of friendliness towards our fellows, near and far, the door of the heart which opens towards God is already partly open. Some have found it a rewarding practice to begin the meeting hour by thinking of persons they love deeply, both those who are present and those who are not. They soon find that this beginning takes

them to thoughts of God and experience of God, for God is Love. We may even begin by thinking of persons whom we do not know, the masses of men and women and children in our strange world who are trying in so many different ways to pursue the difficult business of living. We should thus begin as Walt Whitman began his famous poem and the song of others becomes, in the deepest sense, the Song of Myself, for there is an elemental human kinship.

Agonies are one of my changes of garments,  
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself be-  
come the wounded person.

This Song of Others, after becoming the Song of Myself, eventually becomes the Song of God.

In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own  
face in the glass,  
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is  
sign'd by God's name,  
And I leave them where they are, for I know that where-  
soe'er I go,  
Others will punctually come for ever and ever.

(3) *Meditation and Reading.* There is a third kind of preparation, which is deliberately undertaken, in order to be ready to find God in company with one's fellows, and to pass on messages if they come. Daily periods of quietness in which the individual engages in prayer, thought, or stimulating reading can hardly fail to have their reward in greater richness of life out of which the best things in group worship come. In using the Bible for such devotional purposes experience has taught us that some portions are much more likely to help us than others. The Psalms, the Gospels, and the less prosaic Epistles often speak most directly to our modern life, though the prophetic and historical books are of great value to those who know how to disentangle them. The reverent reading of the world's great poetry, ancient and modern, is an excellent devotional practice, because the poets have probably done more than any other class of men to pierce beneath the commonplace surface of life and discover the hidden wonder. Since all genuine poetry does this,

there is no reason to limit our devotional reading to specifically religious poetry.

The proper use of Saturday evening is a theme which needs to be revived in our day. It is easy to think of ways of spending Saturday evening that are not wicked and yet preclude the possibility of a good meeting for worship on the following day. Perhaps the Hebrew people, who showed the first great genius in the spiritual life, were wise in making the Sabbath continue from sunset to sunset. A few Friends in our day follow rigidly the rule of accepting no invitations for Saturday night and extending none, because they want to prepare their minds and hearts for the coming day. Some find that this is practically the only time available for the reading they need to accomplish. The experience of the late John William Graham bears on this point:

"I think one may rightly begin one's meeting before meeting begins—that is, on Saturday night or Sunday morning, may in a time of quietness lie open to ideas. I spend some of Saturday evening, when it is free, recalling the thoughts that have struck me during the week; very often with no result but a gathered spirit. One may go to Meeting, in that case, empty, but swept and garnished—and the review of one's mental and spiritual harvest continues. All this merely means a willingness to speak, but not yet a purpose to do so."<sup>3</sup>

Probably not all Friends feel that they can begin meeting on Saturday night, but surely they can begin it some time before the hour of assembling arrives. Some try to begin the meeting when they shut the doors at home. A person who begins his meeting thus early may seem a bit unfriendly as he enters the meeting house, but that is only because he has started on a train of thought which he does not wish to have disturbed, and, furthermore, he knows that he can be as neighborly as he pleases when the meeting closes. He is likely to enter more deeply into the spirit of the meeting than is the person who is merely chatty before the meeting settles.

(4) *A leading idea.* The last method of preparation to be mentioned here is more distinctly intellectual than the others, but often has spiritual results. Early in the week a person who

<sup>3</sup> *The Quaker Ministry*, p. 85.



feels a responsibility for the meeting, and every genuine Friend does feel it, may get an idea which is relatively unformed and which nevertheless impresses itself vividly on the mind. If the idea is cherished and continued through the week it often gathers other ideas about it in a truly remarkable manner. Such an idea is a veritable bur, catching on things as it passes. Reading bears unexpectedly upon it and thus the reading is more valuable than it would have been had it been done without the idea in mind. The idea often changes so much that it can hardly be called the same one and the original thought may be practically lost in its accretions, but this cannot happen unless there is a germ idea with which to start. The train of thought thus started may not develop into a message in meeting, but it often does, and it is sometimes held in abeyance for a long time. It is thrilling to think what a meeting would be like in which *all* the members followed such a practice of preparation. There would not necessarily be too much speaking, for such preparation can be combined with restraint, but the meeting could hardly fail to be a time of spiritual growth for all concerned.

After we have prepared ourselves as fully as possible we have done all we can and we must leave the rest to God. With all our emphasis on preparation we must not suggest that worship is a mechanical affair which we can produce at will. After we have planted and watered and cultivated the soil we must wait for the mystery of growth. Though the preparation is in our own power, the worship itself is beyond our power. As Janet Payne Whitney has well said:

"Most often, it seems to me, worship is involuntary. The changing colors of the sky, a moment alone in a green wood or on a hillside, the sheen and sound of running water, a simple deed of kindness done graciously, a high thought spoken or read, some new unity with a fellow-creature,—and the day is changed for us. In its measure, life is changed for us, lifted permanently to a higher plane. Without taking thought, or making effort, our souls worship."<sup>4</sup>

It is still true, as it has ever been, that the wind of the Spirit bloweth where it listeth, but only those whose hearts are attuned are able to sense its influences when it does blow. Our task is

<sup>4</sup> "Worship," p. 4.

to set the sail with patient and continuous care and it is the experience of devout men of all times that the invigorating breath of God Himself will eventually come and fill our humble canvas.

## Aids to Discussion

1. What can we learn from the devout Catholic in his personal preparation for the mass? What is the Quaker equivalent of the Confessional? Do Friends, like Catholics, expect to experience the "real presence"?

2. Attempt to say what your method of selection would be if you were to arrange a "Shorter Bible." Do all of us have what may be called a "Longer Bible" as well as a shorter one? What are some of your inclusions in your Longer Bible?

3. Friends in earlier generations spent much time in the reading of Journals and Memorials. Was this a good devotional practice? What modern biographies help to stimulate the spiritual life? Do some novels help to arouse the mood of worship?

4. Is there any advantage in *walking* to meeting when the place of worship is not too far removed from one's home? If one walks, is it better to walk alone or with others?

5. Should we encourage Friends to keep Journals or spiritual diaries for the purpose of recording stray thoughts? Would ideas so recorded be likely to find their way into the meeting for worship, sooner or later?

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HODGKIN, L. VIOLET, *Silent Worship: The Way of Wonder*. The Swarthmore Lecture for 1919. The book is beautifully written and presents a history as well as an explanation of Silent Worship. The dangers are frankly faced.

STEPHEN, CAROLINE, *Quaker Strongholds*. Though written nearly a half century ago this book still continues to be the most persuasive single presentation of Quaker fundamentals. The author was especially happy in her account of worship. The book has gone through several editions and is available in an inexpensive paper cover.

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